Chapter 14

Useful Phrases

14.1 What's the buzz?

It is a good idea to keep a glossary where you can note down useful generic phrases that you receive in the emails sent to you by native English speakers. You can then 'paste' these into your own emails.

This chapter presents lists of frequently used phrases that have a general acceptance in all types of emails, not just in academia. This means that they are phrases that your recipients will frequently encounter.

The lists are not comprehensive and you should try to add other useful phrases that frequently occur in your field.

Phrases that are very formal are followed by an asterisk (*).

In this section, *you* and *your* refer to the person who wrote the original email, and *recipient* refers to the person who received the writer's email.

The phrases are punctuated as follows:

Where there is no punctuation at the end of the phrase, this means that typically native speakers use no punctuation. This is often the case with the initial and the

final salutation. However, in these cases, it would also be possible to use a comma. So it would be possible to write both of the following:

Dear Adrian

Dear Adrian,

Some writers also use a colon after the initial salutation. Example:

Dear Adrian:

A period (.) at the end of the phrase indicates that the phrase ends at this point.

Three dots (...) this means that the phrase would continue.

A colon (:) indicates that a list and / or comments would follow.

An interrogative mark (?) indicates that this is a question. Note that often phrases that begin "Can you …" or "Could you …" are not considered questions when they are simply a polite way of giving someone instructions. Examples:

Could you send the file by the end of today. Thanks.

Can you let me know as soon as possible.

Examples of real questions are those where the writer is expecting a reply to his / her question:

Can you speak English?

14.2 Initial salutation

Standard

Dear Alfred Dear Alfred Einstein Dear Dr Einstein Dear Professor Einstein

To group / team

Dear all Hi all Hi everybody To all members of the xxx group

To someone you know well

Hi! Hope you are keeping well. Hope all is well.

To someone / some people whose names or job positions you don't know

Hi Hello Good morning To whom it may concern ^{*} but try to find the name of the correct person Dear Sir / Madam ^{*} but try to find the name of the correct person

14.3 Final salutation

Neutral

Best regards Kind regards Best wishes Regards

Informal

All the best Have a nice weekend and I'll write when we're back. See you on Friday. Hope to hear from you soon. Speak to you soon. Cheers

Formal

With kind regards With best wishes Yours sincerely Yours faithfully

14.4 Phrase before final salutation

Very informal excuses for ending

Must go now because ... I've got to go now. That's all for now.

Sending regards to other people

Say hello to ... Please send my regards to ... Please convey my best wishes to ... *

Wishing people well

Best wishes for the holidays and the new year from all of us here at ... Have a great Thanksgiving! Have a nice weekend. Happy Easter to everyone. May I wish you a ... * I would like to take this opportunity to wish you a peaceful and prosperous New Year. *

14.5 Giving main reason for message

To known person or group of known people

Just a quick update on ... Just to let you know that ... This is just a quick message to ... This email is to inform you that ... For your information here is ... This is to let you know that ... Just a quick message to ask you whether ... I was just wondering whether ...

First contact to unknown person

I found your name in the references of X's paper on ... I am writing to you because ... Your address was given to me by ... Your name was given to me by ... Your address was given to me by ...

Making reference to previous mail / phone call / conversation

In relation to / With reference to / Regarding ... Further to our conversation of yesterday, ... Further to our recent meeting, ... As requested I am sending you ...

Making reference to previous meeting at conference

You may remember we met last year ... You may recall that we met at the conference in Beijing ...

Following up telephone call

Thanks for ringing me yesterday. It was good to speak to you this morning. As I said / mentioned on the phone ... I just wanted to check that I've got the details correctly. With reference to our phone call of ... *formal* * Re our phone call this morning ... Further to our telephone conversation, here are the details of what we require. Many thanks for your earlier call. As discussed, details as below:

14.6 Organizing content

Stressing main points and drawing attention to something

What I really want to stress here is ... The important thing is ... The key factor is ... Can I draw your attention to ... What I need to know is ... It is crucial for me to ... I cannot stress how important this is.

Indicating change in subject

One more thing ... While I remember ... Before I forget ... By the way ... Also ...

Summarizing and concluding

So, just to summarize ... So basically I am asking you two things. First, ... And second ... If you could answer all three of my questions I would be most grateful.

14.7 Asking favors / giving help

Asking

I found your email address on the web, and am writing to you in the hope that you may be able to help me.

Please could you ... I was wondering if by any chance you ... I wonder if you might be able to help me. I would be extremely grateful if you could ... Would you have any suggestions on how to ... It would be very helpful for me if I could pick your brains on ... I would like to ask your advice about ...

Showing awareness that you are taking up recipient's time

I realize you must be very busy at the moment but if you could spare a moment I would be most grateful.

If it wouldn't take up too much of your time then I would be very grateful if you could ...

Clearly, I don't want to take up too much of your time but if you could ...

Obviously, I don't expect you to but any help you could give me would be much appreciated.

Accepting

No problem. I'll get back to you as soon as ... I'd be happy to help out with ... I'd be happy to help.

Declining

I'm sorry but ... I'd like to help but ... Unfortunately ... At the moment I'm afraid it's just not possible.

14.8 Invitations

Inviting

In accordance with our previous conversations, I am very glad to invite you to \dots^* I sincerely hope that you will be able to accept this invitation, and look forward to hosting you in *name of town*.

I was wondering whether you might be interested in joining the Scientific Advisory Board of \ldots *

I am writing to you to find out whether you would be willing to ...

Accepting

Thank you very much for your kind invitation to … * I would be delighted to be a member of … * It is very kind of you to invite me to …

Declining

Many thanks for your kind invitation, but unfortunately ...

I am really sorry but I am going to have to turn down your invitation to ...

Thank you very much for your kind invitation. However, I am afraid that ...

Thanks very much for inviting me to ... I am really sorry but I am afraid I cannot accept.

I regret that I cannot accept your invitation at the present time because ... *

I'm sorry to inform you that I do not have sufficient expertise in *topic* to be able to review the paper. *

So it is with great regret that I am afraid that I will have to decline your invitation.*

Withdrawing acceptance

I am sorry to have to inform you that I am no longer able to ...

Due to family problems I am sorry to have to inform you that ...

I am sorry to give you such short notice and I sincerely hope that this won't cause you too much trouble.

14.9 Making inquiries

General inquiries

Hi, I have a couple of simple requests:Could you please tell me ...I would like to know ...Could you possibly send me ...I have some questions about ...

Asking to receive papers

I would like to receive a copy of your PhD Thesis "Metalanguage in Swahili." Last week I attended the workshop on X. I was interested in your presentation on "Y." Have you by any chance written a paper on that topic? If so, I would very much appreciate it if you could email me a copy.

I am a PhD student currently doing a review on the link between right-wing politics and the perception of social justice and I am interested in your article "Social Justice: Are you kidding?" I would much appreciate it if you could send me the article if possible.

Ordering products, materials, chemicals, etc.

What do I need to do to order a ...? I would like to know if I can order an xxx directly from you ... I am looking for an xx. Do you have one in stock?

Ending an inquiry

Any information you could give me would be greatly appreciated. Thanks in advance. I look forward to receiving ...

Following up an inquiry

Thank you for ... Would it be possible for you to send me a bit more information on ... Could you please describe what is included in the ...

14.10 Replying to inquiries

Thanking

Thank you for contacting me ... I am pleased to hear that you found my paper / presentation / report / seminar useful ...

Making reference

Regarding your queries about ... In response to your questions: Here is the information you requested: As requested, I am sending you ... Below you will find the answers to your questions ... With reference to your request for ... Following our telephone conversation about ...

Asking for details

Before I can answer your questions, I need further details re the following: Before I can do anything, I need ... Could you tell me exactly why you need x.

Adding details

Please note that ... I would like to point out that ... As far as I know ... I'd also like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention ... May I take this opportunity to ...

Telling recipients they can ask for further info

Please feel free to email, fax, or call if you have any questions. Any questions, please ask. Hope this is OK. Please contact Helen if you need any further details. If you need any further details do not hesitate to contact me. Should you have any questions please let us know. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need any further clarifications.

Ending

Please let me know if this helps. I hope to be able to give you a definite answer soon. Once again, thank you for contacting me.

14.11 Talking about the next step

Telling recipient how you want them to proceed

Could you please go through the manuscript and make any revisions you think necessary.

Please have a look at the enclosed report and let me know what you think.

If you could organize the meeting for next Tuesday, I'll send everyone the details.

Telling recipient how you will proceed

Thanks for your mail. It will take me a while to find all the answers you need but I should be able to get back to you early next week.

Re your request. I'll look into it and send you a reply by the end of the week. I will contact you when I return.

Sorry, but I'm actually going on holiday tomorrow, so I'm afraid I won't be able to get back to you for a couple of weeks.

Asking recipient how they want you to proceed

Do you want me to ...? Would you like me to ...? Shall I ..?. Do we need to ...? Let me know whether ...

14.12 Giving and responding to deadlines

Telling recipient by when you want a reply

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future / soon / before the end of the week. Please could you get back to me by the end of today / this morning / as soon as possible. I hope you can reply this morning so I can then get things moving before leaving tonight. We would appreciate an early reply.

Please let me have your feedback by Friday so I can send you a draft schedule next week. I know it is a very sharp deadline. So if you don't have time to answer my question, please don't worry about it.

Looking forward to your reply.

When you will reply

I should be able to send you the document tomorrow / within the next two days / first thing Thursday morning. I'll get back to you before the end of the day. I'm sorry but I won't be able to give you any response until ...

Saying what you will do

I will send you all the details re ... in due course. With regard to your email dated ..., I will talk to my colleagues and get back to you ASAP.

Saying what you've done

Given the new data that we now have available, we have ... I have made the following changes: ...

Asking for confirmation if what you have done is acceptable

I hope that is OK—if not please raise with Mike. Is that OK?

Asking to be kept informed

Please keep me informed of any developments. Please keep me up to date. Please let us know the outcome.

14.13 Chasing

Chasing your previous mail

Did you get my last message sent on ... ?

I was wondering whether you had received my email (see below).

May we remind you that we are still awaiting your reply to our message dated \dots^* . We would be grateful if you could reply as soon as possible.

Sorry, but given that I have not heard from you I am worried that I did not explain the situation clearly.

Empathizing with recipient

Hope this doesn't cause you any problems / too much trouble. Sorry if this adds to your workload. I know you must be very busy but ...

Saying when you will be able to fulfill the request

I am afraid I won't be able to start work on it until next week. I honestly don't know when I'll be able to find the time to do it.

Excusing yourself for not having fulfilled the request yet

I am sorry, but as I am sure you are aware, I have been extremely busy doing X, so I haven't had time to do Y. I am really sorry but I have been extremely busy. It's been a really hectic week. I've been snowed under with work.

14.14 Making arrangements for meetings and teleconferences

Suggesting the time

possible.

Let's arrange a call so that we can discuss it further. Can we arrange a conference call for 15.00 on Monday 21 October? Would it be possible for us to meet next Tuesday morning? How about Wednesday straight after lunch? The best days for me would be sometime between October 1 and 10, with a slight preference for early in the week of the 6th. Please let me know if that would be

Informing of unavailability at that time

Would love to meet—but not this week! I can manage Nov 16 or 17, if either of those would suit you.

I am afraid I won't be available either today or tomorrow. Would Thursday 11 March suit you? Either the morning or the afternoon would be fine for me. I'd be grateful if you could let me know as soon as possible so I can make the necessary arrangements.

Sorry but I can't make it that day. Sorry but I'll be on holiday then. I'm afraid I have another engagement on 22 April. Thank you for your invitation to attend your technical meeting. However, I am unlikely to be able to attend as I have a lot of engagements that day.

Declining

Unfortunately, due to limited resources I am unable to accept your invitation to come to the meeting.

I regret that I will not be able to attend the meeting.

until later in the week? Weds or Thurs perhaps?

Changing the time

Sorry, can't make the meeting at 13.00. Can we change it to 14.00? Let me know. Re our meeting next week. I am afraid something has come up and I need to change the time. Would it be possible on Tuesday 13 at 15.00? We were due to meet next Tuesday afternoon. Is there any chance I could move it

Confirming the time

The meeting is confirmed for Friday at 10:30 am Pacific time, 12:30 pm Central time. Please send any items you want to discuss, and I will send an agenda earlier in the morning.

Responding to confirmation of the time

I look forward to seeing you on 30 November. OK, Wednesday, March 10 at 11.00. I look forward to seeing you then. OK, I will let the others know.

Cancelling

I am extremely sorry, but I am afraid I will not be able to participate in the teleconference that was arranged for next week.

I am sorry to leave this so late, but it looks like I won't be able to make the conference call tomorrow.

Due to family problems I will not be able to ...

14.15 Sending documents for informal revision

Explaining background

I am currently working on a paper that I would like to submit to ... The paper is the extension of the work that I ... The draft is still at quite an early stage.

Explaining reason for sending document to this specific person

Given your expertise, it would be great if you could take a look at ... I would really appreciate your input on this because ... I know that you have done a lot of research on this ...

Requesting help

When you have a moment do you think you could ... ?

Could you possibly ...

If you get a chance could you ...

Do you think you might be able to help me with ...?

I'd be grateful if you could help us with ...

Could you please check these comments and let us know if you still have any issues with ...

I hear you may be able to help out with writing the paper.

Please have a look at the enclosed report and let me know what you think.

Giving specific instructions

It would be great if you could read all of Sections 3 and 4. However, if you are short of time, please just read the last two subsections of Section 4.

Please let me know if you see any need for additions or deletions.

Don't worry about any typos at the moment or minor inconsistencies in the notation. If you have any comments on x they would be gratefully received.

Just think about general aspects, such as whether I have missed anything vital out, or my reasoning doesn't seem to be very logical.

I'm attaching the draft in two versions: a pdf of the complete manuscript, including the graphs, and a Word file of just the text—this is so that you can write any comments directly on the file using Track Changes.

Giving deadlines

I know this is a lot to ask, but as I am already behind schedule do you think you could give me your feedback by the end of next week? I know you must be very busy but ... Once you have reviewed the document, please forward it to ...

Resending documents

Sorry, but I inadvertently sent you the wrong document.

I have made a few changes to the manuscript. If you haven't already started work on it, please could you use this version instead. If you have already started, then please ignore the new version.

14.16 Receiving and commenting on documents for informal revision

Accepting to do revision

I would be pleased to read / revise your document for you. I am happy to give you my input on the first draft. I'd be happy to help out with editing some sections of the paper. Thank you for sending the manuscript. I just had a quick glance at it, and it looks very promising.

Declining request to do revision

I am sorry but I am extremely busy at the moment. I am afraid I simply don't have the time to ...

Declining a request for help after an initial acceptance

I am writing to tell you that unfortunately I no longer have the time to ... This is because ... Once again my sincere apologies for this. I am extremely sorry about this and I do hope it does not put you in any difficulty.

Saying when you could begin / complete the work

In the next couple of days I will go through it and send you my comments. I am very busy in the next few days, so I won't be able to start till Monday if that's alright with you? I should be able to finish it by the middle of next week. I will send you Section 3 tomorrow night, and the other sections over the weekend.

Making positive comments

First of all I think you have done a great job. I have now had a chance to look at your manuscript, it looks very good. I was really impressed with ... The only comments I have to make are:

Suggesting changes

While I like the idea of ... I am not convinced that ... I'm not sure whether ... It might not be a bad idea to ... Have you thought about ...? It seems that ...

Asking for clarification

I have a few questions to ask. Could you just clarify a couple of aspects for me:

Replying with revised version attached

I have read the manuscript carefully and made several changes and corrections. I hope I have not changed the sense of what you wanted to say. Attached are my comments. I think the paper still needs some work before sending to the journal. Please keep me up to date on the progress of this manuscript. Let me know if you need any more help. Please give me a call if I can be of any help. Don't hesitate to contact me if you need any more help. I hope this helps.

Replying to comments

Bogdan, you did a great job, thanks so much! Thank you for your comments—they were really useful. I completely understand what you mean when you say ... Thanks for bringing it up. Many thanks for this. All points noted. Yes, I see what you mean. Thanks your comments were really helpful.

14.17 Referees reports

Making a summary of the paper

The paper deals with ... The paper gives a good description of ... This manuscript reports some results on the use of ... The aim is to assess the quality of ... This paper has many positive aspects ...

General criticisms

This paper aims to report the analysis of ... yet the author writes ...

The author needs to clarify the following points ...

Despite the title of the paper, I believe that the paper does not deal with X at all. Specifically ...

The analysis in Section 2 only covers ... Even though these are important parameters, they do not ...

Although the description of X and the samples collected seems to be detailed, accurate, and well documented, the analytical work and the discussion on Y are in need of major revision.

The manuscript does not present any improvement on the analytical procedure already described in the literature; moreover the authors fail to ...

The discussion should be reviewed since it is mainly based on results published in ...

Specific comments

Abstract: What is the real advantage of the proposed procedure with respect to ...? page 3 line 12: The word *definite* is misspelled.

page 4: Perhaps Figure 2 could be deleted.

The following information is missing in Section 2:

There seems to be a missing reference in the bibliography.

Recommending rejection

For the above reasons, I believe that the paper is not innovative enough to be published in ...

The paper is not suitable for publication in its present form, since it does not fit the minimum requirements of originality and significance in the field covered by the Journal.

14.18 Author's reply to referees and editors

Asking for extension to deadlines

I am writing to ask whether it would be possible to extend the deadline for final submission of our paper until June 14.

The referees asked for several new experiments which will take us an extra two or three weeks to perform.

I apologize for the inconvenience caused by its late submission.

I am writing to inform you that due to unforeseen circumstances, we have to withdraw our paper.

Enclosing revised manuscript and reply to referees' reports

Attached is the revised version of our paper.

As requested, we have prepared a revised version of our manuscript, which we hope addresses the issues raised by the two reviewers.

As requested, I'm sending you the paper with the changes tracked.

Saying how your reply to the referees is organized

Below are our responses to the reviewers. The reviewers' comments are in italics, and our responses are numbered.

Rather than going through each report individually, we have organized our response under general areas.

Making positive comments about the reviewer's comments

Please extend my sincere thanks to the paper reviewers for their helpful comments. The reviewer's suggestion is certainly helpful and ... The reviewer is right. These two comments made us realize that ...

Outlining changes made

We have improved the paper along the lines suggested by the Referees. I have considered all the comments and suggestions made by reviewers of this paper, and I have incorporated most of them in the final version of this paper. We have amended the paper addressing most of the comments provided in the referees' reports.

The tables have been enlarged and we hope they are now clearer.

The Abstract and the first sections have been improved.

We have amended the paper following the indications that you and the referees gave us. There is now a new table (Table 1) reporting the ...

We have reduced the abstract to 150 words.

On the basis of Ref 1's first comment, we changed several parts which, as you can see, have been tracked.

Saying why some changes were not made

Reviewer 1 raised some substantial criticisms that would entail an almost completely new version of the paper.

We have tried to address the points he made but we have not been able to completely put into action all the recommendations he suggested. In order to do that, we would have gone beyond the intended scope of our paper.

Actually, this is not entirely true. In fact, ...

I understand what the referee means, however ...

The referee is absolutely right when he says .. Yet, ...

Concluding

Overall we hope we have addressed the main points raised by the reviewers. Once again we would like to thank the reviewers for their very useful input and we also found your summary most helpful.

14.19 Generic problems

Describing

Unfortunately I have a problem with your ... There seems to be a problem with ... I'm afraid there is a slight problem. I am not sure I can ... That might cause us ... I think the server may not be working correctly. I am not sure whether you sent me the right file.

Trying to understand the problem

I am not completely clear what the problem is. I'm sorry but I don't seem to be able to understand the problem. If possible could you give me more details to clarify the situation. I'm not really clear about this—please clarify. So if I have understood correctly, the problem is ... So you are saying that ...

Showing that you have understood

Right, I understand. OK that's clear now. OK I am clear now. Fine.

Resolving

OK. I'll see what I can do.I'm sorry about that. I will look into it immediately.Don't worry I am sure we can sort it out.I'll look into it and get back to you first thing tomorrow morning.I will contact you again shortly.Let me know if there is anything else I can do for you.Just give me a call if you need anything else.

Saying that the problem is being resolved

I promise I'll have it back to you by the end of this week. Rest assured that you'll have it within the next two days. I'll do it as a matter of urgency. I'll make it my top priority. I'm just writing to assure you that we are working on the problem.

Explaining the cause of the problem

The reason why this happened is ... This was due to ... It was related to ...

14.20 Asking for and giving clarification

Asking for clarification when you don't understand

I'm not sure what you mean by ... What exactly do you mean by ...? Sorry, what's a "xxx"?

Giving clarification when reader didn't understand

What I meant by xxx is ... My point is that ... In other words ... So what I'm saying is ... So what I am asking is ... So my question is ... In other words ...

Giving clarification when recipient thought they understood but hadn't

Sorry, no what I meant was ... Sorry about the confusion, what I actually meant was ... Sorry I obviously didn't make myself clear.

Checking that you've understood

I'm assuming you mean ... Do you mean that ...? So are you saying that ...? By xxx do you mean ...?

Checking whether recipient may have misunderstood

I am a bit concerned that you may have misinterpreted my email. You sounded a little annoyed in your last mail. Maybe I had not expressed myself properly.

Acknowledging misunderstanding

OK, I'm sorry—you are right. I misunderstood. Sorry about that, we obviously had our wires crossed! Sorry for the confusion.

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Hoping you have been clear

I hope this helps clarify the problems. Does this all make sense now? Have I clarified everything for you? Do you understand what I mean now?

Replying when you have been given clarification

OK, understood. OK, I'm clear now. OK, but I'm still not clear about ...

14.21 Thanking

Thanking recipient for responding to your email

Many thanks for your email. Thanks for getting back to me. Thank you for the quick response.

Thanking in advance

Thanks in advance. Thanks for any help you can give me. Thank you very much for your assistance. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Thanking for help already given

Thanks for your help in this matter. Thank you for your help in solving this problem. Many thanks for this. Thanks once again for all your trouble.

14.22 Apologizing

For not answering mail sooner

Sorry for the delay in getting back to you. Sorry I haven't replied sooner. I apologize for not sending you the information you requested. Apologies for the late reply. Please accept our apologies for not getting back to you sooner.

For not answering mail sooner: excuses

Please accept my apologies, I was convinced that I had replied to you. Sorry, but I have only just read your message now. I have just got back from a conference. I've been away for the last few days. Sorry, but our server has been down, so we haven't been receiving any mails. Sorry but we've been having emailing problems. Sorry but your email must have gone into the spam.

For your email not arriving

For some reason my last email had delivery problems. So here it is again just in case you didn't get it first time round.

Please reply to the above address as our regular connection is down. Thanks very much.

For sending an incomplete email

Sorry I accidentally hit the send button.

Repeating apology at end of mail

Again sorry for the delay. Once again, apologies for any trouble this may have caused you. Thanks and once again sorry for not getting back to you straight away.

14.23 Sending attachments

Telling receiver about your mail

I'm attaching ... Please find attached ... Attached you will find ... Here is ... As you will see from the attached copy ...

Asking for confirmation of receipt

Please confirm / acknowledge receipt. Let me know if you have received it. I'd appreciate it if you could confirm your receipt via either fax or email. Please could you acknowledge receipt of this mail as I am not sure we have your correct address. Let me know if you can't open the file.

Giving confirmation

This is just to confirm that I received your attachment. I will get back to you by 9.00 tomorrow morning.

I confirm receipt of your attachment.

Telling sender you couldn't read the mails / attachments

Sorry I couldn't read your mail—it just has a series of strange characters. I received your mail, but I'm afraid I can't open the attachment. When I try to open the file the system crashes.

Telling sender they forgot to send the attachment

Thanks for your mail but I'm afraid you forgot to send the attachment. I think you forgot to send the attachment. I can't find the attachment.

Sending attachment again

Sorry, I just sent you an email without the attachments. Sorry about the problems. Here's the attachment again. Let me know if you can read it. Oops. Sorry. Here it is.

14.24 Technical problems with email

Problems with Internet connection

Sorry our server has been down all morning.

Sorry but they are doing maintenance work tomorrow morning and I won't have access to my email.

My Internet service is currently not working at home, which also means I can't call out. But I should still be able to receive incoming phone calls.

14.25 Out of office message

Adrian Wallwork is on leave from Monday 07/08 to Wed 16/08. If you have any problems or queries please contact Anna Southern at anna.southern@virgilio.it. I'm out of the office all day today but will get back to you tomorrow regarding any urgent messages.

If you have any urgent messages you can contact me on my mobile: [0039] 347 ...